

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 004809

EXDIS MILITARY HANDLE AS SPECAT EXLUSIVE

FOLLOWING REPEAT SEOUL 137 SENT ACTION SECSTATE JAN 09.
QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 0137

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS CINCPAC

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, KS, US
SUBJECT: STRATTON VISIT TO KOREA

SUMMARY: CODEL STRATTON SPENT FOUR DAYS IN KOREA EXAMINING
THE DESIRABILITY OF U.S. GROUND TROOP WITHDRAWAL. IT CON-
CLUDED THAT PRESIDENT'S PLAN WILL CREATE RISK AND THAT
FULL PROPOSAL SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED UNTIL PEACE TREATY
CONCLUDED. END SUMMARY.

1. AT THE END OF CODEL'S FACTFINDING VISIT, CHAIRMAN
STRATTON ISSUED A RELEASE, WHICH STATED THE SUBCOMMITTEE
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HAD MADE THE FOLLOWING PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

"PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

"1. WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD HERE CONVINCES US THAT FULL
WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. GROUND COMBAT TROOPS FROM KOREA WITHIN A
PRE-SET TIME SCHEDULE WILL CREATE FAR GREATER SECURITY RISKS

THAN EXIST IN THE PRESENT SITUATION.

"2. KOREA, IT MUST BE CLEARLY RECOGNIZED, IS A VALUABLE MILITARY BASE AVAILABLE TO THE UNITED STATES IN AN AREA OF GREAT STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO THE INTERESTS AND SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES. NO ONE IS TRYING TO KICK US OUT OF HERE OR RAISE THE RENT. WE BELIEVE THE UNITED STATES CAN ILL AFFORD AT THIS PARTICULAR JUNCTURE SIMPLY TO WALK AWAY FROM SUCH A VALUABLE AND IRREPLACEABLE STRATEGIC ASSET.

"3. WE HAVE DISCOVERED THAT KOREA HAS ALSO PROVED TO BE AN EXCELLENT AND VERY CHALLENGING MILITARY TRAINING GROUND FOR AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND MARINES WHICH CANNOT BE MATCHED ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES. WE WOULD LOSE MUCH OF OUR U.S. COMBAT READINESS BY ABANDONING IT.

"PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS:

"1. WE ARE PERSUADED THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT CONGRESS ACT TO PREVENT BY LEGISLATIVE MEANS ANY HASTY, ILL-TIMED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. COMBAT TROOPS FROM KOREA; AND WE INTEND TO WORK TO ACHIEVE THAT END.

"2. WE FAVOR BUILDING UP THE COMBAT CAPABILITIES OF THE KOREAN ARMED FORCES ALONG THE GENERAL LINES OF THE 'COMPENSATORY ACTIONS' ALREADY AGREED TO BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND

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THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA.

"3. U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS MUST BE BASED NOT ON CALENDAR DATES BUT ONLY ON CLEARLY DETERMINED PRIOR EVIDENCE THAT NEEDED COMBAT CAPABILITIES, NOT JUST PHYSICAL EQUIPMENTS, HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN TRANSFERRED TO REPUBLIC OF KOREA FORCES.

"4. FINALLY, WE ARE FIRMLY PERSUADED THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT A BASIC U.S. GROUND COMBAT FORCE REMAIN IN KOREA UNTIL THE PRESENT ARMISTICE HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A GENUINE PEACE SETTLEMENT."

2. ARGUMENTS MADE BY THE EMBASSY AND OTHERS ON THE VALIDITY AND THE FEASIBILITY OF THE PRESIDENT'S WITHDRAWAL DECISION HAD LITTLE, IF ANY, EFFECT ON THE SUBCOMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS. THEY APPEARED TO HAVE A BIAS AGAINST WITHDRAWAL UPON ARRIVAL, WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN REINFORCED BY SOME EVIDENCE COLLECTED IN KOREA.

3. IN CONVERSATIONS THAT THE CODEL HAD WITH U.S. AND ROK OFFICIALS, IT SEEMED TO BE CONSIDERING ATTACHING A RIDER TO THE EQUIPMENT TRANSFER COMPENSATORY PACKAGE, WHICH

WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF BLOCKING OR AT LEAST DELAYING THE FINAL STAGES OF THE WITHDRAWAL. IN ADDITION TO THE CRITERIA ESTABLISHED IN PARAGRAPH FOUR OF THE "PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS" (WHICH WE AND PRESIDENT PARK TOLD THE CODEL WASN'T LIKELY TO HAPPEN IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE), CODEL WAS ALSO CONSIDERING EXTENDING THE WITHDRAWAL PERIOD BEYOND THE FOUR TO FIVE YEARS ALREADY AGREED TO AND INCLUDING IN THE PROGRAM AN AUTOMATIC CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW PROCESS TO ENSURE THAT ROK FORCES HAD ABSORBED ADEQUATELY THE EQUIPMENT THAT WAS BEING TURNED OVER TO THEM. CODEL ALSO DISCUSSED OTHER CRITERIA POSSIBILITIES, SUCH AS CROSS RECOGNITION, FOUR-POWER PEACE CONFERENCE, OR MORE PERMANENT STABILITY MEASURES BEYOND THE CURRENT ARMISTICE AGREEMENT.

4. THE CODEL MET ALSO WITH PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, FOREIGN
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MINISTER, DEFENSE MINISTER AND SPEAKER AND SAW A NUMBER OF KOREAN PERSONALITIES AT A VARIETY OF SOCIAL OCCASIONS. THE PRIME MINISTER, IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH CODEL, EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF THE COMPENSATORY MEASURES. FOREIGN MINISTER SUGGESTED THAT WITHDRAWAL TIMETABLE WAS TOO RAPID AND THAT KOREA NEEDED MORE TIME THAN THE FOUR-FIVE YEARS PROPOSED. HE ALSO NOTED THE DESIRABILITY OF EXTRACTING A QUID PRO QUO FROM THE NORTH KOREANS IN RETURN FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT PRIMARY ROK CONCERN AT THIS JUNCTURE WAS TO SEE THAT COMPENSATORY MEASURES WERE PROMPTLY ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS. HE ALSO STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL UNANIMITY IN SUPPORTING THE COMPENSATORY PACKAGE FOR THE ROK IN ORDER TO HAVE THE MOST BENEFICIAL IMPACT ON THE NORTH KOREANS. STRATTON NOTED THAT IF CONGRESS WAS TO BE ABLE TO COMPEL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE WITHDRAWAL PROPOSAL, IT WOULD HAVE TO USE THE LEVERAGE PROVIDED BY THE APPROPRIATION PROCESS IN CONNECTION WITH THE COMPENSATORY PACKAGE--WRITING INTO THE LEGISLATION SUCH PROVISIONS AS A REQUIREMENT THAT NO MORE THAN 6000 TROOPS COULD BE WITHDRAWN UNTIL THE ADMINISTRATION HAD REPORTED TO THE CONGRESS ON PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO THE REDUCTION OF TENSIONS IN THE PENINSULA.

5. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER CHONG IL-KWON REVIEWED WITH CODEL SIGNIFICANCE OF KOREA IN REGIONAL POWER BALANCE AND URGED THAT WITHDRAWAL TAKE PLACE OVER TEN RATHER THAN FIVE YEARS. CHAIRMAN STRATTON RESPONDED THAT CODEL WOULD HAVE THIS SUGGESTION VERY MUCH IN MIND WHEN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MODIFICATIONS TO THE WITHDRAWAL PROPOSAL TO THE COMMITTEE.

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